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## Exploration and Discovery

### THE GEZER STONE

Palestine continues to surrender her historical treasures to the patient and diligent biblical students who, with pick and shovel, are determined to read her past.

The latest important discovery was made this year by Professor Macalister. It consists of a stone tablet with an inscription, found in the ruins of the ancient Canaanite city of Gezer. This city, situated to the west and a little north of Jerusalem, more than midway to the Mediterranean port of Joppa, or Jaffa, was one of those that upheld the pride of the ancient Philistines in checking the invasion of the Israelite clans as they came fresh from the desert, full of the spirit of conquest and led by their valiant captain, Joshua. The editor of the Book of Joshua, who wrote probably some time after the Exile, confesses (Josh. 16:10) that "the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer" were never dislodged by the Israelites, but "dwell among the Ephraimites unto this day," and then adds by way of patriotic partial satisfaction, "but they serve under tribute." The writer of the Book of Judges marks a similar limit to the conquest of Canaan as respecting Gezer (Judg. 1:29). Some three or four hundred years after Joshua, a king of Egypt, contemporary with King Solomon, captured and sacked Gezer, and gave it as dowry to his daughter who had become the bride of King Solomon; and Solomon had rebuilt it with other pillaged cities of the land (I Kings 9:15-17).

This stone or slab of Gezer is inscribed in archaic writing similar to that of the famous Siloam inscription discovered about thirty years ago (1880), which gave a specimen of the writing in Jerusalem, at the time of the prophets Isaiah the First and Micah, and during the reign of King Hezekiah, about 700 B. C. The Moabite stone of King Mesha, discovered in 1868, and the stone of Zakir, king of Hamath, discovered later, date from 890 to 700 B.C. and are written in similar style and characters, the style and character being closely akin to ancient Hebrew.

The modern orientalists who first studied this Gezer stone recognized the word *month* repeated eight times in seven of the lines of its inscription. After the word month follows what seems to be the agricultural labor proper to that month. These orientalists perhaps hastily called this stone the agricultural calendar of Gezer. But there are only eight months and not twelve mentioned; and the stone appears complete as originally cut. It is

therefore subject to a different explanation as to its use and purpose, and the following is offered.

The stone is perforated with one hole, as if to be hung up in some public place for the inhabitants to read and take notice. The list of months enumerated begins with the labor of the autumn months, after the style of the Canaanites and the ancient Hebrews in civil or agricultural matters. The agricultural year began with the harvest of wheat, just as the agricultural year with the modern farmer begins practically with the spring work of plowing in March or April, and not in January.

A tentative translation and interpretation of these nine lines is here offered, including three words which are obscure:

IT IS DECREED:

To his month of harvest; to his month of sowing  
 To his month of last fruit gathering  
 To the month of hemp thrashing  
 To the month of barley harvest  
 To the month of (wheat) harvest and storing in barns  
 To his month of pressing (olives, grapes, etc.)  
 To the month of summer fruits

OF THE PRINCE OF GEZER

If this translation is correct, then the inscription would not be an agricultural calendar, as was first suggested. That would hardly be useful to the people of the country, who probably knew the time to plant and sow and harvest without being told by decree or publication. But it seems to be a publication of a levy or of direct taxes due to the one signed at the bottom of the inscription as THE MIGHTY OF GEZER, or PRINCE OF GEZER—as in the Old Testament “The Mighty of Jacob” means the Prince of Israel, and by inference Yaweh. If this stone antedates the capture of the city by the Pharaoh of Egypt, then it would be the agricultural taxes levied for the support of their native Philistine prince. If it is of the date, as it probably is, of the time subsequent to Solomon, then it is the publication of the agricultural levies made by the prince that ruled under the sway of one of King Solomon’s successors.

The words “to his month” or “to the month” refer naturally to the time when the work mentioned should be done after the harvest, seed sowing, etc. The names of labors to be done correspond closely to the names in the succession of the agricultural labors mentioned in the Old Testament. For instance, the barley harvest is spoken of in the Book of Ruth and elsewhere; the prophet Amos in his vision speaks of the summer fruits typifying the approaching end of Israel, because these ripen at the end of the season

or agricultural year. It is worth noticing that with the ancient defective and probably variable spelling of those times, *the end* and *summer* or *summer fruit* were written with the same characters.

If this translation and explanation are correct, or even if subsequent discoveries and further study throw new light on this and other contemporary stones and inscriptions, one can easily appreciate the value they constitute in the study and comprehension of the writings, the people, and the life of Old Testament times, and how Palestine is still the land that explains the Book.

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